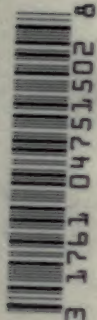


Gompers, Samuel.



THE  
EIGHT-HOUR WORKDAY:

ITS INAUGURATION, ENFORCEMENT  
AND INFLUENCES.

By SAMUEL GOMPERS.

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# THE EIGHT-HOUR WORKDAY:

ITS INAUGURATION, ENFORCEMENT AND INFLUENCES.

BY SAMUEL GOMPERS.

## "What are the Causes that have led to the Agitation of the Eight-Hour Day?"

To answer this question accurately, to treat of the movement to reduce the hours of labor, and present the subject in a fairly intelligent form, we cannot arrive at any true conclusion or present intelligently the facts in connection therewith, unless consideration is given to those elements and conditions which have, from time immemorial, gone to make up the sum total of man's activity.

At best, man does not work simply for the pleasure attained by the employment. Man works because it is necessary to his life. He recognizes the fact that unless he work to-day he may have little opportunity of living either to-day or the days to follow.

We see that in all countries where the necessities of life are easily obtained, work is of the most primitive character, necessities are not large, opinions are not diverse, desires do not grow; enough to eat for the day is sufficient, the morrow may and will care for itself. If life remain, assurance is at hand that food and such shelter as may be essential is easily obtained and accessible. On the other hand, in those countries where climatic changes are most frequent, where the full seasons of the year, spring, summer, fall and winter, occur with great regularity, and oft-times with great severity, man is required not only to exercise his functions in order to work for the day in which he lives, but to provide shelter for the burning heat of summer and the fearful havoc of winter's cold blasts.

To these latter conditions, more than to all others, are due the great progress made along economic lines leading to social, rational and moral progress. The changing seasons and varying climatic conditions gave, and still give birth to the idea among men that it is necessary to provide in one season for the severities and emergencies of the others. Perhaps to these facts more than to all else is due the great flood of light which broke through the gloom of the effete monarchial and feudal institutions with the dawn of the Nineteenth century. Official barriers were broken down, and necessity, the "mother of invention," asserted herself; the darkness of ages had been lifted from the minds of man, and there burst forth the splendid discoveries and inventions that followed each other in quick succession. With the discovery of steam power, and the invention of machines operated by steam power, the next essential, artificial light, by which this new force—these new machines—could

be utilized when the sun no longer shone on our horizon, the bright, artificial light was discovered and applied.

With steam power, machinery and artificial light, the eldorado of capitalism was at hand, and contemporaneous with that era may be counted the epoch which broke the limit of man's daily hours of labor from "sun to sun" and bounded at once to the highest possible limit, the maximum of human endurance.

At this period the history of the civilized world is most interesting to the student who looks for his facts, for cause and effect, beneath the gilded words of superficial writers. In the early years of the new eldorado of machinery, the rapacity of the employing class not only compelled the laborer to work all the hours that could be endured, but ruthlessly the women, the girls, the young were brought into the mills and factories to work, to work at ages which would bring a blush of shame to the cheek of the barbarian. The "slaughter of the innocents" is not an exaggerated description of the manner in which industry was and to a great degree is still conducted, and sought to be prosperously conducted.\*

Wretchedness, misery, squalor, poverty and hunger were the laborer's share in the great advances made in the field of industry. Premature decay, bent and dwarfed forms, pinched cheeks, sunken eyes and early death were the workers' reward for their labor. The welfare of the nation, the prosperity of the race was threatened.

It was most fortunate for the workers of the whole world that in the early days of steam and machinery, among Great Britain's titled and landed aristocracy there existed a deep rivalry and keen hatred for the manufacturers, the employers of labor, the business man. The latter were striving for the recognition of equality and that position in social as well as economic life they were entitled to. The titled gentry regarded them as vulgar and brutal. It was while these feelings were most in-

(1) \*In Massachusetts in 1894, I was present at a hearing before the committee on industries and labor of the legislature, on a bill to reduce the hours of labor of children from 60 to 58 per week. The counsel for the Mill Owners' Association (Arkwright Club) declared that "when you take children out of the mills you take the heart out of the industry."

(2) The law upon the statute books of Alabama, prohibiting the employment of children for more than ten hours a day, was repealed by the legislature of that State at its session in 1894-95. This was done with the avowed purpose of inviting capital to invest in cotton mills. The restrictions upon the exploitation of the labor and life of the children were removed.



tense that the workers, men, women and children, were worked the hardest and longest.

It was at this time that a wail of anguish from the poor, unorganized and struggling workmen of England went up for relief, for help. The aristocracy of that country, perhaps as much out of resentment for the assumption of the *common* manufacturers and business men as sympathy for the workers, took up the cry in Parliament, which finally resulted in the first enactment to limit the labor of women and children in the mills of England to twelve hours per day. From that day the workers began to carry on the movement to reduce the hours of all labor in all employments, public or private. Of course it must be borne in mind that the movement is not simply to reduce the daily working hours to eight. It is for eight hours to-day and less if needs be for the future. The same objections, the same antagonism, the same ignorance, the same arguments, and the same specious pleas had to be met and overcome in the earlier movements to reduce the hours of labor to twelve, to eleven, to ten, to nine, that we are now called upon to meet. The causes that have led to the agitation of the eight-hour workday are the same now as when the question of limiting the working hours was first broached.

Machinery is being introduced "faster than new industries are founded." What is the result? Myriads of men and women walking the streets of our cities, traversing the highways and byways of our country, vainly seeking an opportunity to earn their living by the sweat of their brows. The unemployed workers are a constant menace to the higher wages and other conditions which labor has secured. The burdens imposed upon the employed workers, the velocity with which they are required to toil (faster than that of any other people of the whole world), is enervating to the last degree. The determination that a reaction shall not set in, that the race shall not become slaves, serfs, or perish from the face of the earth; the recognition that there is no influence so potent to improve the character of the workers, instill manhood and independence in their breasts, enlarge their opportunities, widen their scope, make them larger consumers of their product, enhance their value, broaden their minds, enlarge their sympathies, make them nearer the equals of their fellows, cultivate their better tastes, their better natures; in a word, to make them better men, and in becoming better men to be better able to participate and enjoy the blessings of a bountiful nature and an enlightened age, and progress, perpetuating freedom and civilization. These may reasonably be assigned as the causes which have led to the agitation for a reduction of the hours of labor—an eight-hour workday.

The workers demand leisure. With Spencer, they who have borne the awful strains and burdens of wearisome and exacting toil, not only preach, but seek to enforce the "Gospel of Relaxation"—less hours of labor—leisure. "Leisure to live, leisure to love, leisure to taste our freedom."

Who can look on the vast army of unemployed, workless workers, without feeling and recognizing

that a great wrong is being perpetrated upon them. Certainly there may be some now who would not work were it offered them, but the observer will note that these are rare exceptions, and even they have become careless or reckless by easy stages on the downward grade. Demoralization caused by periodical, and then permanent enforced idleness by reason of inability to secure employment. Beyond doubt, the saddest sight is to see a man, with wife and children looking to him as the bread winner, without work, without food, without hope. That unemployed men are demoralized men is soon learned by those who frequently have an opportunity to come in contact with them; that their courage soon gives way to despair, losing self respect, early forfeiting the respect of others—go down and further down until society, in its might, has its hand raised against them. Society regards them as its enemy; the feeling becomes mutual.

The only factor which earnestly, sympathetically and practically recognizes the awful conditions of the unemployed is the organized labor movement in its effort to reduce the hours of all, and thus secure an opportunity for the employment of all.

#### WHAT EFFECT WOULD THE INTRODUCTION OF THE EIGHT-HOUR WORKDAY HAVE UPON THE INTERESTS OF LABOR?

After all the arguments are adduced pro and con upon the question to reduce the hours of labor, the most important consideration must resolve itself into what influence this change will have upon the interests of labor. For, differ though we may upon all else, we agree that what will really advance the material, hence the moral and social well-being of labor, must beneficially reflect and act upon the whole world of civilization. We cannot successfully improve the foundation of a structure without correspondingly, permanently perfecting the structure itself. The simile holds good when applied to the structure of society, the foundation and support of which is the great body of labor, the producers of wealth. Let us see then what effect the reductions of the hours of labor have had upon the interests of labor; and judging the past by the present, it is safe to venture the prediction that the same causes will produce the same results in the future.

In every industry where the hours of labor have been reduced, through the efforts of organized labor, it has been followed with these results:

Wages have been increased; periods or seasons of employment have been lengthened; the number of unemployed has been reduced; the consuming power of the laborer has increased; the leisure resulting from the lesser hours of manual labor has opened up a vista of opportunities which have made the laborer not only a worker but more of a man, with all that that ennobling term implies.

It has made him more temperate in all things and given him a clearer conception of his rights and duties as a worker, a father, a citizen and a man. It has made him more independent, more enlightened, broader in his views and in his sympathies. He has become a better safeguard to his country's honor and its interests, a stancher defender of his



home and fireside. He struggles more intensely and more wisely against every form of wrong and injustice and to attain the highest conception of human rights. Are these claims merely the result of fancy or too great an optimism, or are they the consequences of the movement to reduce the hours of labor?

Do wages increase when hours of labor are shortened? I venture the assertion that in no industry in the whole world has there been the slightest deviation from the affirmative to this claim. We may view any industry we please, wherever it may be located, and the results will be found to be the same. Not only this, but it is easily discernible, and may be taken as a general rule, that wherever and in whichever industry the daily hours of labor are the longest, wages are lowest; and wherever and in whichever industry the daily hours of labor are least, wages are highest.

Compare any two or more countries on the face of the globe; compare any two States in the United States; compare any two cities in any one or more States; compare any two industries in any one city; yes, compare any two establishments of a similar industry in any one city and there is no departure from this rule that the longer the hours of daily labor the lower the wages, and *vice versa*.

We will go even further in illustration of this invariable rule and cite a fact which everyone can easily ascertain and observe for himself.

Take any one establishment where a large number of workers are employed, and it will soon be learned that those workers whose hours of labor in that establishment are the longest, receive the lowest wages paid to any employees therein; while those who enter the works daily the latest in the morning, and depart earliest in the evening, are in receipt of the highest wages.

In the study of this apparent economic paradox, we shall see, too, that this rule of which we have spoken does not even vary when the skilled and unskilled workers are compared. That is, all other things being equal.

When skilled workers in any one industry work longer hours daily than do the unskilled workers in another industry, or calling, the same rule will apply. An instance will demonstrate this.

Factory wood workers work from ten to twelve hours a day; wages from \$1.25 to \$1.75 per day. Machinists usually work ten hours a day; wages about \$2.00 to \$2.50 per day. Hod carriers work usually nine, and, in some instances, eight hours a day; wages range from \$2.25 to \$2.75 per day. Were the machinists, wood workers and others to devote more of their skill to the plain as well as the scientific consideration of their interests, and secure a reduction in their hours of labor to eight per day, is there any doubt that it would be followed by increased wages?

Suppose the workers would argue somewhat as follows: "The greatest article of value known to man is time. Heretofore we sold you ten hours of our time each day, for which you paid us \$2.00; when we demurred to this low price you answered that there was a great glut of that article—time (labor), in the market; now since time (labor) is

the only article that we possess and have to sell and must sell, and since there is such a glut of it in the market, we propose to economize and to offer you only eight hours daily of our time (labor), reserving the means (vitality, strength) to sell you the same quantity of time (labor) to-day, to-morrow and the days yet remaining to us. This will relieve the glut in the market, and, according to the law of "supply and demand," the immutability of which you have so often and so unctiously spoken, the price of the article we have to sell, time (labor), will rise.

Perhaps many of the workers do not argue in this fashion, but their movement to reduce the hours of labor is in line with its reasoning. Where is there the business man, the thinking business man, who is in business for other reasons than "his health," who will say the laborers nay? Is business conducted on other, or more equitable principles? At least the laborers have on their side all that is just and humane in their claim. They see the genius of ages centered in the wealth producing and wealth distributing methods; they see the unemployed going a-hungred and those depending upon them wither like tender buds before a late blast or frost in spring; they see themselves that they soon may be compelled to change places with those whom society regards as the submerged—the unemployed; their children suffer and wane and die; they know that they themselves are unnecessarily required to work burdensome, wearisome and enervatingly long hours; that they and theirs are consequently deprived of the opportunities, which leisure alone affords, to lead a better, a higher, a nobler life.

But entirely apart from the reasoning along the lines presented by the above monologue, it can be demonstrated that a reduction in the hours of labor is of the greatest interest and advantage to the wage earners as well as the whole people.

There must be some other cause or incentive which really forces the workers to demand higher wages for less hours of labor than the mere fact that a better opportunity for demanding it has come or will come.

The fact is, that the workers who have secured a reduction in their working hours can no longer afford to work at such a low rate of wages as was paid them under the old regime of long hours. They have time and leisure on their hands with which they must do something, and do what they may. New tastes are acquired, new desires have been created; with them new expenses are incurred. It may be that the increased leisure brings forth a desire, a taste, a demand for a book, a paper, a magazine, either of which creates a further demand; perhaps, yes, generally for an additional room in the worker's home. An additional room requires additional furnishings, a carpet upon the floor, a picture upon the wall, a musical instrument. Leisure forces the worker's attention to the clothing of the wife and the children, it compels the worker to be in the streets at the time when people are best dressed; he and his must be clad as near or approach to the average or they will be regarded as social inferiors.

Leisure instills the desire to travel, to see other



parts. Leisure cultivates tastes for art, music, the concert, operas, the theater. But the new opportunities devoted to or directed in any channel are no longer luxuries. The luxuries of the past have become the necessities of to-day, and all mankind agrees that in order that the workers may be counted upon to continue their labor, their necessities of life must be assured them. It follows, therefore, that to make the luxuries of to-day the necessities of life for the morrow—to continually raise the standard of life of the workers—is in the highest degree sound economy; moral, social, and material progress in the interests of the workers is progress in the interests of all.

Of course, it would be idle to attempt to ignore the charge which is often hurled against the workers' movements to reduce the hours of labor, that the increased leisure would be spent in the saloons in drink. To this charge we can point to the fact that there is even to-day a lesser production and consumption per capita of the liquors the poor usually drink than ever before since statistics have been ascertained, while on the other hand the liquors which the means of the rich only can afford to supply have increased largely per capita and in the aggregate. There is, however, other and better evidence to disprove the charge that the increased leisure of the workers results in drunkenness and debauchery. Workmen, as soon as they organize, seek meeting rooms in the buildings in which liquor is not sold. The rendezvous of labor, when unorganized, is usually the saloon; when organized it is transferred to the meeting room, the club room, or library. Before the era of trade union activity, the saloons were the employment agencies. The trade unions in every large center now conduct free labor bureaus, free from saloon influences. Many, particularly unskilled workmen, have had to bear the sacrifices of prolonged strikes to force a change in the places on "pay day," to receive their wages from the saloon to the "job." Countless instances are in evidence that in the old era men had to loiter in and around the saloons to obtain employment, and the "best fellows," who would spend the most time and money to get into the good graces of the saloon keepers were the ones who obtained employment soonest.

One need but observe the workers whose hours of labor are comparatively low as compared with others whose hours of labor are longer and the contrast is at once noticeable and striking. The short hour worker's complexion is clearer, his eyes are brighter, his carriage and head more erect. These indications are necessarily and invariably absent from the long hour and hard drinking workman. Then again look through the police statistics and notice the comparative scantiness of the number of arrests for drunkenness and disorderly conduct of cases coming from the workmen of those trades where the short hour day prevails.

Those who have carefully observed the changes which have come to the workingman from a reduction in the daily working hours have marked most gratifyingly the fact that they have become most temperate in the liquor as well as in all other

habits.\* Well has it been said that the men who have the spirit ground and crushed out of them by their too long hours of toil seek to regain that spirit in the cups at night and at every other conceivable opportunity.

Among thinking men there is no dispute that there is but one way to permanently improve the conditions of the people, that is by improving their habits and customs. We submit to the candid mind that there is no possible way to improve the habits and customs of men whose hours of labor are so long that their opportunities of life are circumscribed by eating so that they may work, sleeping so that they may work, scarcely dreaming or hoping for anything but work. They live to work instead of working to live. What reform, social, moral, political or economic, was ever achieved by the effort of long hour workmen? Which of them ever secured the eradication of a great wrong, stood for, or were identified with a struggle for a great principle? If the progress of the world depended upon the long hour workers, our civilization would halt, reaction would set in, slavery or serfdom would be the lot of the workers, barbarism and savagery would be the order of the day. Yes, thrice yes, the movement to reduce daily hours of labor to eight, its agitation, inception and enforcement is in the interest of the workers of our country and of the whole world.

#### WHAT EFFECT WOULD THE INTRODUCTION OF THE EIGHT-HOUR WORKDAY HAVE UPON THE INTERESTS OF CAPITAL?

To fairly and exactly state the real effect that the introduction of the eight-hour workday would have upon capital is beyond doubt the most difficult of the series of questions submitted for this article. The answer will no doubt bring about me a storm from the one or the other, and perhaps both interests usually known as "Labor and Capital," but which, more properly speaking, should be known as laborers and capitalists. Between capital and labor there is and can be, no dispute; between laborers and capitalists there is often and perhaps a never ending conflict so long as the parties shall hold these respective attitudes in society. The question then, of the influence of the movement to

\* (1) The manager of the extensive paper mills of Prince Paskievitch, of Dobrusch, says that he has been the manager for twenty years, and adds: "The nature of the business requires that the work be carried on day and night. Up to May, 1894, the length of the shifts was 12 hours. Eighteen months ago I determined to try and reduce the hours of those working by the day to 9, and of those employed on shifts to 8. Instead of increased drinking by the workmen, the result has been that the only drink-shop in the place has had to give up business, its place being taken by a tea-shop, where only moderate quantities of spirits can be obtained. "St. Monday" [Blue Monday, S. G.] is almost a thing of the past. The older people, as a rule, employ their leisure time in tilling their plot of land . . . The younger ones have taken to reading. An orchestral and vocal union has been established, of which 36 factory operatives are members. Between 400 and 500 operatives regularly attend lectures. . . . Such things were impossible under the old 12 hour system; for there is only one recreation for exhausted workers and that is spirit-drinking, which quickly stimulates their energies."

(2) "It is a flippant libel upon the laboring class which for more than half a century has been constantly repeated but never sustained, viz., that the reduction of the hours of labor tend to lower wages, raise prices, increase idleness, dissipation, and drunkenness. . . . The elimination of poverty, ignorance, pauperism, intemperance, crime, and their accompanying evils, move parallel with and proportionate to the increase of the social opportunities of the laboring class."—Prof. George Gunton's Economic and Social Importance of the Eight Hour Movement, page 20.



reduce the hours of labor, requires some separate consideration as to its influence upon capital and upon capitalists.

Capital may be properly defined as the residue of production over and above raw material, wages, wear and tear of machinery, rent, management, etc., this residue being again used in the production of wealth. To define the capitalist we may merely say that he is the possessor of this residue—stored-up labor—which he employs for further production, residue and profit.

The conflict between the laborers and the capitalists is as to the quantity, the amount, the wages the laborer shall receive for his part in production and the residue or profit which shall go to the capitalist. The one is the seller of an article—time—labor; the other is the buyer of this same article. Between the sellers and buyers of any one thing there never yet has been a community of interests. This conflict for the largest share of the production has gone on from time immemorial, and cannot cease until the laborers shall be the capitalists, i. e., the capitalists shall be the laborers. In other words they shall be one and the same.

In the development of industry there is a constant increasing necessity for a large share of production to be stored in order that future production may be successfully carried on, upon a still greater scale. Yet to retain this share or residue, and to accord labor its constantly increasing and just share is a problem which the future alone can solve. Whether it be by the abolition of all patent rights, monopoly in land, monopoly in money and monopoly of opportunity, or by the common ownership of the means of production and distribution, the present can at best be only a state of theory, speculation and conjecture.

But during the development and progress, there can be no question that, notwithstanding the awful influence and injury modern industrial conditions have upon the unemployed, wages to labor generally tend upward, the share per capita and per dollar to the workers becomes larger. On the other hand, the larger scale upon which production is necessarily carried on makes it essential that great aggregations of capital be employed. It is, therefore, that we see the inability of the small manufacturer or business man to succeed, or compete (unless in very exceptional cases and due to an incident or accident which cannot be considered with the general proposition) with the larger or bonanza concerns already in the fields of industry and commerce.

It is because of this that there is a constant change of the individual manufacturers into partnerships, companies, corporations, and trusts. The residue or profit of the individual manufacturer is insufficient to successfully carry on the business. It is this diminution of the profit of the capitalist per dollar, requiring the great aggregation of capital to successfully prosecute industry. It is because of this economic development and growth of the partnerships, companies, corporations, and trusts that the legislative enactments seeking their curtailment or destruction have proven impotent. There is but one power that is at

all competent, and will in time unquestionably be able to cope with combinations and trusts and bring them within the reasonable scope of their legitimate function in the interest of the whole people, and that power is the much despised organized labor movement.

That the movement of labor to reduce the hours of labor has much to do with the acceleration, with the development of industry that is taking place, no keen observer will dispute. Necessity is said to be the mother of invention. Each successful effort to reduce the hours of labor makes the laborers larger consumers of their product. It brings into the ranks of the employed thousands previously unemployed, makes of them consumers as well as producers; while before they were non-producers and scant consumers. Each such stage and step brings forth the necessity for still further improvement in the means of production—improved machinery. This process is either quickened or lessened in each and every industry in the same ratio as the movements of the workers to reduce the hours of labor is successful or otherwise.

We see that in every industry where the hours of labor are the longest that there the least improvement in machinery and in productive methods take place; that there the least output of the individual and collective workers is the rule, and where the hours of labor are least, that the best machinery, the greatest individual and collective output is the case. Certainly there must be a cause for this fact. Need we look further for it when we know that this rule is invariable?

Employers of labor, in the modern sense, can only have existence where,

1st. The hours of labor of the workers are least when compared with the workers of any other country.

2d. Where the wages of labor are the highest when compared with the workers of other countries.

3d. Where industry is carried on upon a large scale.

What opportunities are there for employers of labor, or what other excuse is there even for the existence of an employing class among the Eskimos, among the American Indians, or among other uncivilized people? The most extensive and successful employers of labor are only possible where the workers are best paid, work the least number of hours, are best conditioned, have the best surroundings, and are, therefore, the largest consumers of their productions.

That these conclusions are based upon truth may be easily learned by following this list of nations in which hours of labor are longest, wages lowest, the workers the least consumers, and employers less extensive and successful, as the reverse of these conditions prevail, each growing in material prosperity in the order named: China, Japan, India, Italy, Hungary, Spain, Austria, Russia, Germany, France, Great Britain, the United States, the workers of the last two nations being the largest consumers of the wealth in the world and both nations marching at the head of civilization.

Nations oft in the effort to extend a market for



their industries, and an opening for their commerce, are engaged in wars involving the lives of countless thousands of human beings and the destruction of millions of dollars of the product of their people, when the "home market," the increase in the consumptive power of their people, is lost sight of, when to create one additional want among the workers of a nation will give industry and commerce an impetus it can receive from no other source. Why not then devote our thought and policy to such peaceful means of relief and improvement? It has been said: "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war." Then peace, which is as essential to successful industry as is air to lung-breathing animals, resulting from the general advantages and blessings of a shorter workday—the gospel of relaxation will bring us our renown. It should—yea, must—be the mainspring of our progress and success.

But in the realm of every day life of the employers they are not apt to take a broad, comprehensive, enlightened view of this question. They are more apt to look upon the subject from its immediate rather than its future effect; hence it is necessary to treat it from that standpoint.

No one will deny that we not only have competition among workers and workers, but also among employers and employers; and so long, at least, as our present industrial and social system shall obtain it is doubtful that this will cease or lessen in acuteness. Is there, however, an employer who is at all inclined to be fair to his employes who has not felt the awful and degenerating influence which some of his unscrupulous—commonly known as "cut throat"—competitors have wrought in the business by contemptible methods of hiring the lowest priced labor and demanding the longest hours of labor.

In most things, except cost of labor, employers are fairly on an equality. They can usually buy their material in the same market and at the same prices. Machinery, rent, etc., are just about the same to all. The difference in prices is in the cost of labor. When contemplating, or "figuring" for a contract or in bidding for the world's market, should there not be some basis, some minimum wage and maximum hours of labor upon which the calculation should be made? Should there not be some line, at least a "living wage" upon which employers could go forth upon an equality in the field of trade? Surely every instinct of justice, not only to the toiler and those depending upon him, not only for the preservation of our race, but also our civilization which hangs in the balance; surely every sense of fair dealing, every regard for progress, success in industry and commerce, demands that in labor, above all things, the meanest of employers shall have no unfair advantage over those whose inclinations are in an opposite direction, and who, too often, are forced into the same offensive, reactionary and destructive position. Could industry by any possibility be conducted on the methods of the meanest, unchecked by labor, there is no telling how low down in the industrial world the workers of our country would

sink, and how far our civilization would be dragged down with it.

But thanks to the organized labor movement of our country and our time, which stands as a check upon this downward tendency, this downward grade which leads to degradation and despair; the labor movement, whose advocates, once spurned and imprisoned, but now consulted, whose professions of justice and humanity once ridiculed and condemned, now argued with and listened to; whose claim for a higher and more intelligent method of industry and commerce denounced as demagoguery and sophistry, now often heeded and followed, the organized labor movement. The early protest of the "lowly," the later defender of the toilers, the present outpost of justice, the harbinger of a better day to come among men, the labor movement, compels the attention of the foolish as well as the wise, and insists that this world of ours shall be a better world, and the men and women thereof shall continue in their march undaunted and brave, ready and better prepared to meet the day when man's injustice to man shall be relegated to a dismal past.

The foremost demands of the organized labor movement is for a shorter workday. It is in the interest of labor; it must necessarily be in the interest of progress; hence, capital. It is the harbinger of more successful industry and commerce, its tendency is upward and will surely help to solve the greatest of all problems of our lives on a peaceful, potential and permanent plane.

HOW WOULD THE EIGHT-HOUR WORKDAY READJUST ITSELF; THAT IS, HOW WOULD BUSINESS READJUST ITSELF TO THE CHANGE IN THE HOURS OF LABOR?

To answer this question one might nonchalantly point to the past and say that inasmuch as in the early days of our present methods of production by machinery, new tools and new inventions, the reduction of the hours of labor has gone on from early morn to late at night, and when reduced to twelve hours a day, from twelve to eleven, from eleven to ten, from ten to nine hours a day, and that business in each instance has easily adjusted itself to the altered conditions resulting therefrom; that inasmuch as none but beneficial results have followed in the wake of the movement to reduce the daily hours of labor, so will business easily adjust itself to our present demand for an eight-hour workday.

But it is apprehended that this will not be all satisfying and will require a further answer; hence, before this matter is further presented, it will be necessary to refer to past movements and note their results.

For nearly a century the hours of labor of the workers have continually tended lower. Each step in that direction has been either the precursor or has been followed by the introduction of new machinery, new inventions, new tools of labor, new, easier, cheaper and better methods of production. The pace with which the hours of labor have been reduced is a safe measure of determining the rapid-



ity with which the other above named results have followed.

In the early days of the century, custom, tradition, kept the employers of labor in old ruts, the day of rapid development had not yet set in, the mind of man had not yet adapted itself to expect and to inaugurate phenomenal changes that would more resemble a human economic kaleidoscope than a mere alteration from hand or primitive labor to the highest and most concentrated agencies of production and distribution. It was, therefore, that in the absence of the general introduction of the latest forces of wealth producing methods that the necessity for the movement for a shorter workday had not made itself so manifest, and was not so frequently inaugurated. But as time went on and the old gave way to the new, the movement gained momentum, and we therefore see that the greatest efforts of labor and of labor organizations are concentrated upon this all prevailing, all absorbing question.

No one for a moment imagines that the eight-hour workday will be generally enforced upon a given moment, although that business could and would easily adjust itself to the radical and simultaneous change there should be no doubt.

Before 1884 the Cigarmakers Union members and nonunionists in the United States worked as many hours as their inclinations or forced circumstances compelled; in 1884 they were set at a maximum of ten hours per day; in 1886 within four months after the resolution to that effect was approved by the journeymen, the eight-hour day was the universal rule, and has been so to this day, to the advantage of all concerned.

As the result of the general movement of May 1, 1886, more than 250,000 workers secured the eight-hour day, and a million of others gained a shorter work day,\* yet business easily adjusted itself to the new conditions; in fact, a period of general business prosperity ensued.

In 1889 a movement was started looking to the enforcement of the eight-hour workday, May 1, 1890, among the carpenters of the country, the net result of which was among carpenters, among whom ten hours was the rule and nine the exception. After the date named 46,197 had secured the eight-hour workday and nearly the entire remainder of that craft gained the nine-hour day, and and since then the eight-hour day is the general rule in all of the building trades of large cities, and nine hours elsewhere. Does any master builder decry the new rule now? Does that vast interest now claim that business has not adjusted itself to the shorter workday? Certain it is that the "Master Builders Association" is on record testifying to the mutual benefit of the measure and urging its general adoption.

In the Government works of the United States the eight-hour day is the rule. The English, German and Russian governments have recently made

experiments in reducing the hours of labor to eight per day in some departments and retaining the old ten-hour system in other departments of the same line of work. With one accord the officials all testify to the advantage and benefit of the change and propose at no distant day to generally introduce it. Employers of labor in the United States or of any other country who have the eight-hour system of labor all bear testimony to the general good resulting from the change. If the results were different, if business did not easily and readily adjust itself to the change to an eight-hour work day, is it not strange that there is no body of employers (and the writer does not know of a single case) which has ever given the system a fair trial, say of one year, which would ever return to the old regime of a nine-hour or a longer workday.

No one appreciates more than I the fact that there is no "sentiment" in business, and that therefore, for the purpose of this article at least, it must be argued from the standpoint of business and its effect on business. Yet it may be reasonably asked whether any person who has not bidden adieu to his senses really believes that the world would stand idly by and witness the sad havoc played with myriads of human beings by modern industry conducted on "business principles," simply in the interest of a comparative few and to the detriment of the great mass of mankind.

Every one who thinks at all rationally admits that at some time early or in the remote future a change, yes, a radical change, must and will take place in the economy of life. The only questions of difference are as to when and how the change will be brought about. With the first question of time we have at present no concern, but with the second it is our bounden duty to reckon. Reform saved England, revolution saved France from reaction and slavery. I am sure that none can accuse me of being a pessimist, a "calamity howler" or an alarmist, yet I am thoroughly convinced that modern society is presented with the same alternative.

The organized labor movement presents a reasonable and gradual method for the peaceful solution of this great problem, this great question which will not down until it is finally settled by the full installation of man into his natural right, his full estate, or by his retrogression, involving the degradation of man, the destruction of civilization. I am not pessimistic enough to believe that the latter will be the outcome. I have too much faith in the sterling character, the integrity, the manhood, the independence instilled into the masses by the achievements of the labor movement to for even a moment doubt that the future will be a brighter, a happier and a nobler one than has yet dawned upon the earth.

Business is timid. It seldom ventures except upon trodden paths. Labor's proposition for a shorter workday is now met by the same opposition against which previous movements in the same direction had to contend. It can only be proven that an eight-hour workday means greater and a more general prosperity when it is introduced. There are few who can be induced to make

\* As a result of the movement of May 1, 1886, street and steam railway employes, bakers, tailors, garment workers and other workers (generally unskilled) too numerous to mention, who before worked 14, 16, and in many instances 18 hours a day had their hours generally reduced to 12 and are now 10 or less.



the experiment except by the power exerted by the organization of the workers.

The propositions of labor do not introduce arbitrary or new principles into society, yet they are opposed by the capitalists, economists (false economists would be more appropriate) and statesmen. The first insist that the business cannot pay the increased cost of labor; the second asserts that prices of the finished product will be increased, and the third hides himself behind the plea that it is against the interests of society. That all history proves their premises false and their reasoning pure sophistry counts as nothing with them. Demonstrate that our life and progress in industry and commerce is the living proof of the truth of labor's claim, that their thesis is baseless, and they go on in the same lines with perhaps greater tenacity as if they would declare: "So much the worse for the facts of history."

It may be true that business might suffer and prices of the finished product rise, if an increase in wages would bring about no change in the mode of life or standard of living of the workers. That is, where an increase in wages would all be hoarded. But a permanent increase in wages is only possible by the advanced and improved standard of life of the workers which necessarily makes them larger consumers; hence, a larger market; hence, greater and more improved methods and reduced cost of production, and consequently lower prices.

As to the influence of a shorter workday upon society, we need to view the vast number of idle men and women of our country, the misery, squalor and degradation into which countless thousands of them have sunk and are sinking, and ask ourselves if it is not high time that so far as law can affect the labor of the "Nation's wards"—the women and children—the hours of labor should be limited and regulated; and that so far as governmental power and influence can be exerted, it should be upon the side of those who are the bone and sinew, the foundation and the main-spring of a country's greatness, prosperity and progress. Certainly, if long hours and low wages were the cause of progress, of the industrial and commercial success of a nation, China would stand at the head of civilization. As the standard of life of the workers rise, vice and crime diminish, and the inverse of this proposition is also beyond dispute. Hence, wise statesmanship should dictate a course which will tend to a higher life, only possible by a higher standard of life secured by a reduction in the hours of labor.

Legislation and the movement of labor for reduced hours of labor have yielded better results socially, economically, morally and politically than any other species of legislation and action known to human experience. The couplet is as appropriate to-day as when first written:

"Ill fares the land; to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

The movement to reduce the workday to eight hours will undoubtedly be inaugurated. It is an universal demand; some people, some industries are nearer its achievement than others, but come it must, and when it does, business will readily

and easily adjust itself to it, for it is the movement of the many, by the many, in the interest of all.

#### HOW CAN THE EIGHT-HOUR DAY BE INTRODUCED WITH THE LEAST FRICTION TO EXISTING CONDITIONS?

As a matter of fact, if a wise public spirit, a comprehensive and intelligent view be taken by the employing class generally, there need be no friction whatever with the introduction of the eight-hour workday. The friction, if any, which occurs, and which may occur, is because the wealth possessors refuse to harken to the new spirit of the times born of the new changes which are every moment taking place in industrial life.

The wage workers are not content, and will not content themselves with the roseate promises of the so-called, but illusionary, general benefit which may come from pursuing the policy of *laissez faire*. That principle of economy (lack of principle would be a better term) which produced the famines in India, in Ireland, and was in vogue in the middle ages in many countries and in numberless instances since; which brought poverty, misery, and degradation, costing millions of lives, brutalizing man, and from which conditions heroic and desperate and bloody revolutions alone saved them; that principle of economy which is calculated to lull the workers into a fancied security will not be endured.

The workers fully recognize that to be heeded they must be heard; that if they hope to have their grievances considered, their claims adjusted, their just demands acceded to, they must organize, agitate, and educate; and by the earnestness and persistency with which they press their cause will tangible and practical results follow.

There exists a denser ignorance among the wealthy classes in society as to the real tendencies of the labor movement and the sound economics contained in the demand for a shorter workday than among all others. They seldom deem it necessary to listen to the laborers' plea for justice and fair dealing, the laborers' claim upon society for a greater consideration of their rights; in a word, they imagine it unnecessary to learn the laborers' side of the labor question. So long as this practice obtains there will undoubtedly be more or less friction with every move the workers may make to secure any reform, great or small.

In 1856 the Australian workmen inaugurated a movement for an eight-hour day. At first there was some little friction; every interest soon adjusted itself to it; and since then the eight-hour day obtains generally.

The building, printing, cigar and numerous other trades in the United States enforced the eight-hour day with little and in many instances no friction at all. It is a fact capable of easy demonstration that there is always greater friction in the efforts to reduce the hours of labor of workers who theretofore worked ten or more hours a day, to the ten or the nine-hour day than is experienced by nine hour workers to secure the eight-hour day. This greater friction is due to two causes; one is that the workers in those industries have been poorest



organized, have shown less resistance to injustice and less determination to acquire a larger consideration of their rights; the other is, that their employers have become accustomed to look upon the simplest request of their workers as an impudent assumption to "dictate" terms.

As a consequence, friction and conflict; in that conflict industry is often paralyzed, society is impotent and looks on aghast.

We want no friction, our aim is to avoid conflict. Toilers recognize, however, that there are worse evils than strife for the achievement of a great necessary reform and that is, when a million of their number who may go on increasing, and may soon reach a point when any of them may be rendered homeless, penniless, and friendless; when they and their loved ones see nothing but a dismal future before them and for those who may follow. These evils it is urged are greater than a conflict for their obliteration and supplanting them by cheerful firesides, a nobler manhood, a more beautiful womanhood and a happier childhood.

Of course it would be most agreeable to introduce the eight-hour workday without any friction at all. Certainly, every sincere man, having a due regard for the general welfare, should endeavor to the best of his ability to suggest such propositions as in his judgment would cause the least possible friction or conflict in connection with the efforts made for its general introduction. With that object in view the following is submitted:

1st. The general organization of the workers in the unions of their respective trades and callings. The encouragement rather than the antagonism of employers to that end.

2d. The organization of the employers in the association of their respective industries.

3d. The mutual recognition of committees, business agents or walking delegates, for the adjustment of disputed questions of interest.

4th. The meeting of the committee of the organized workers of the country with the committee of the organized employers, one from each industry for the purpose of deciding upon the following:

(a) The general and simultaneous (or as near simultaneous as possible) enforcement of the eight-hour workday in all industry and commerce. Of course, a clause providing that in cases of great public danger longer hours should be permissible.

(b) The consideration and adjustment of all grievances and proposed reforms of a general character.

(c) A declaration that the avowed purpose of the joint bodies are to earnestly endeavor to aid in the gradual, general, and peaceful solution of the labor problem.

(d) The joint bodies (committees) to meet as frequently as may be necessary, but not less than once a year.

(e) That upon the program of business each year one of the propositions shall be: "Is a reduction

in the hours of labor necessary; if so, to what extent shall they be reduced?"

(f) Children under the age of fourteen years shall not be employed in any industrial or commercial pursuit.

Of course, I do not for a moment imagine that these suggestions will be accepted or be acceptable to the great body of employers, but there can be no real dissent from the opinion that their adoption would largely contribute to the introduction of practical and much needed reform; that they would be helpful in the solution of the labor problem with the least possible friction to existing conditions and with little or no conflict in their achievement. As a reminder it may be said that these propositions are but an extension to the nation of what already exists in many localities among the best organized workers and employers.

But should these suggestions and others of a similar nature be ignored and the methods of conciliation be spurned, what other resource is there left for the workers? Quietly and supinely submit like their prototypes of old, throw themselves before the modern juggernaut to have their hopes, aspirations, aye, their very lives ground and crushed out of them to be coined into the Deity of the hour, the Almighty Dollar? No, positively no.

We will continue to organize the forces of labor, securing a concession here and there. We will seek to secure the shorter workday if possible without causing a ripple or a shock; and yet, as certain as the organized labor movement strives to avoid strikes and does avoid them and reduces their number to a minimum, rather than allow the workers to be robbed of their birthright—the birthright of an opportunity to live, and to live as intelligent human beings, entitled to their share of the inheritance of their sires—the past ages; rather than be denied their just share in human progress, they will strike, and strike hard, and if necessary simultaneously and long until all shall accord them the full meed of praise, "well done," and after the struggle over society and business conditions will soon and easily adjust themselves to the new order of things.

The barometer of life indicates a state of unrest and discontent incomparable with any time in the history of man. These indications justify the predictions that the workers will demand their just rights and achieve them, and first and foremost among these demands, justified by experience, as an economic, social, moral, and political necessity, is the universal enforcement of the eight-hour workday.

Speed the day of its coming, for it means a new era of progress among men, sung by poets, dreamed of by philosophers, struggled and hoped for, and will be conquered and inaugurated by labor; for labor omnia vincit.

*Note.*—The above was originally written for the Bureau of Labor Statistics of Michigan, the questions being propounded by Commissioner Charles F. Morse.

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